

Unjustified Criticism of CIA

THE existence of Central Intelligence Agency offices in various U.S. communities, including some university towns where the agency recruits new employees, periodically prompts an adverse, surprised reaction from some politicians.

Neither the surprise nor the criticism is justified. But since the tenor of some reporting has created the impression the CIA is some sort of American KGB, the general public has a false, potentially dangerous, misconception of the agency and its mission.

The CIA is charged by law with the collection, evaluation and analysis of intelligence on foreign nations. It employs both the oldest and most futuristic means. Its operations in this country are primarily the processing and analysis of a vast flow of information from abroad. In volume, most of that information comes from open sources, especially foreign publications.

The CIA began life in 1946 as the Central Intelligence Group by executive order of President Truman. Its original staff was largely borrowed from the State Department and the armed services. It became a statutory agency in 1947. The FBI is charged with security intelligence within this country; the CIA was given that task outside our borders.

CIA offices abroad often work closely with the local governments, who provide usually ac-

curate economic, political and social statistics. But its agents are able to provide the added data to confirm or contradict such information.

Information comes to the CIA from satellites, from listening post antennae around the world, and from technical specialists. After the revolution in Iran, the role of the radio relay stations there received wide, and unwanted, publicity. Some CIA electronic devices can decode, then translate, foreign language secret transmissions.

Americans returning from abroad provide valued information on a voluntary basis. They are interviewed where they live and work more often than in Washington. That is one reason for CIA's field offices in this country. To understand developments abroad, it is often necessary to keep abreast of parallel or related developments here at home. That, too, is often done through field agents.

If American policy is to be sound, it must be based on complete, accurate information. Much of that information, often the key part, is provided by the CIA. Efforts to portray the agency as a threat to individual freedom in this country create obstacles to its accomplishment of that important task.

It is unfortunate that it has become politically fruitful to be paranoid about the CIA. It is not looking over your shoulder.

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